

## **My Danny Matters**

**By: Teresa Pasquini**

At birth, my first-born son, was the most beautiful and healthy baby. My husband and I and our whole family were beyond in love with him. Who would have ever believed that this perfect and pure baby would spend so much of his adult life shunned by society and locked away from his family because of a brain illness?

My son's first psychiatric hospitalization occurred at the age of 15. He was diagnosed at 16 with a serious mental illness through the collaborative efforts of an amazing pediatrician and therapist. Early treatment began and education supports were secured. A job and high school diploma were achieved. Treatment worked until the age of 18 and then the system allowed it to stop working.

My son was hospitalized on his 18th birthday and overnight I learned that my rights as a parent were over. Because my county did not have Laura's Law, California's AOT, the only way to ensure his safety and treatment was to urge a public LPS Conservatorship. Over the next 15 years I would fight to annually renew his Conservatorship in order to ensure treatment before tragedy. We were successful and Danny's multiple revolving hospitalizations began. When he returned to our home or a community placement, the medically necessary continuity of care and supports quickly failed.

Today, I am the proud mom of a 32 year old adult child with schizoaffective disorder and what I know for sure is that there is NO right to treatment for those who are the most disabled by severe mental illness.

Danny now spends 23 hours a day in a jail cell in the beautiful Napa Valley. He is awaiting a competency ruling by the court. He has been in and out of two state hospitals for almost 3 years on an Incompetent to Stand Trial hold. It is a torturous process. I yearn to hug him, help him, and heal him.

My Danny is slowly dying from hopelessness and fear. I fear that I may never see him walk back through the door that I carried him through as a baby. The same door he walked out of in handcuffs over 50 times during a psychiatric crisis. I did my job to keep him safe and others safe. It is the health system that failed us both.

I have a dream today.... I hope we all dream for my Danny and all of the Danny's who matter. We have to dream big. We have to act big. The Helping Family's in Mental Health Crisis Act is a big dream for families like mine. We must all act collectively to make it a reality.

Thank you.